

El and the Bunny Ears Method by everybreatheeverymove

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Summary:

Headcanon: When she was little, they'd given her buckled shoes and plain pinafores. When she was old enough, all she was given was a medical gown and a pair of underwear. Never in that time was she given a pair of lace-up shoes, much less taught how to actually tie shoelaces. Once he discovers this, Mike can't help but take it upon himself to teach her.

"I'll do one to show you, and then you can do the other." He dares to look down at the girl then, finds her already observing him from her spot on the couch, "Sound good?"

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Author's Note:

Based on [a post](#) I made about how El wouldn't plausibly know how to tie shoelaces, and how she must have learnt, courtesy of Mike. It's canon now, folks. So, you know, enjoy this in-universe, missing scene fluff!

- Jo.

He's pretty sure he hasn't done this in months; tied someone's shoelaces for them. The last time had probably been with Holly a few weeks ago, when his mom was too busy talking on the phone to help the youngest Wheeler with her pumps.

Mike had sat his sister down on the bottom step, told her to hold the spare shoe while he tied the first one. Holly hadn't really paid him much mind, hadn't really listened to his instructions, but she was just a toddler so it's not like he could blame her anyway.

This is different though. It's different because El isn't some kindergartner, and she isn't at an age where kids just haven't *learnt that yet*.

"Okay, so," Mike's brows dip, and he lets out the smallest of sighs in readiness, "I'll do one to show you, and then you can do the other." He dares to look down at the girl then, finds her already observing him from her spot on the couch, "Sound good?"

El just shrugs, keeping her gaze locked onto his face as Mike kneels down in front of her. He slides his legs beneath him, resting his palms

flat on the carpet as his clothed kneecaps dig into the hard ground. He casually picks up the closest pair of sneakers, randomly thrown atop a stack of jigsaws. They're blue with beige soles and they're far from being his favorite's.

He plops the unlaced shoes down beside him, eyes on the sweatpants she's wearing. Reaching a tentative hand out, Mike looks up at the girl with caution, suddenly less confident in his movements.

El offers him a simple nod of her head with a twitch of her eyebrow, watching as he wraps his palm around her left ankle, slipping her socked foot into one of the sneakers. She wiggles her toes around inside the shoe for a moment, having grown unfamiliar with the feeling.

(When she was little, they'd given her buckled shoes and plain pinafores. When she was old enough, all she was given was a medical gown and a pair of underwear.)

"Does it fit?" Mike asks, hand still around her ankle. He retracts it away as soon as she nods again, ushering a soft 'yes'. He nods, and proceeds to slide the other sneaker onto her other foot. With both shoes on, El presses her elbows into her knees, leaning over just so to observe him, watch as his hands move around.

Mike picks up the first lace of the left shoe, and he clears his throat, "Uh, so," he pauses, glancing up at her in slight trepidation, "Bunny ears?" He ties his own laces the regular, standard way, but he remembers how Nancy had once taught Holly about the bunny ears method. It's easier for kids, right? And, while El's not a little kid, she's also-

“Bunny ears?”

“Yeah.” Mike grins, cheeks flaming up at the gentle way she says the word ‘bunny’, “You make two hoops instead of one, it’s-“ He shrugs, casual as he collects himself, “Just trust me.” He says.

El draws her lips tight, but she doesn’t say anything as he proceeds to tie a simple knot with both shoelaces. He makes a loop with the first lace then, keeping the point where the lace crosses held between two fingers, and he does the same with the other shoelace, making a loop and crossing it in the middle.

She watches in deep concentration as he — after glancing up at her for approval, for the go-ahead— places one of the loops behind the other and tucks it under, pulling the longest loop out again until they both knot together.

“Okay?” He plops the tied laces back down, and then his gaze shifts to her other foot, “You try.” He picks up the first lace, waits until she plucks it from his fingers before moving backwards just an inch.

El considers the string for a moment, eyes focusing in on the lace as though it’s some task that she’ll never accomplish. But before Mike can offer any further words of encouragement to comfort her, she’s tying a simple knot with both shoestrings, yanking on the ends to make sure it’s tight enough. She smoothes her fingertips over the left string then, the material rubbing against the pad of her thumb, “Around.”

Mike raises both eyebrows when she makes her first loop, the ends of the lace stretched out into a much-too-big hoop.

“Not so big.” He places a hand over hers then, letting out a small chuckle at the sheer size of the loops. He pulls on the strings once she loosens her hold, and he makes smaller loops to show her once again.

“Oh.” El nods, blinking rapidly, “Smaller.”

“Yeah. Smaller.” Mike smiles, letting go of the laces when she moves to take over, practically snatching the strings from his hand. He rests his hands on his thighs, watching as she makes her first loop, smaller and together this time. “See?”

The girl grins, sheepish and childlike, and the corner of her mouth curls up as she makes her second loop. She holds the two loops tight between her fingers, eyes narrowing as she goes to pull them into a knot.

She wraps the right loop behind the left, pulling out through the front until they slide against one another, forming a knot against the top of her shoe.

The loops hang loose by the sides of her sneaker, and she wiggles her toes again.

“Like... this?”

“Yeah.” Mike confirms with a nod, and his eyes brighten, “Exactly like that.”

(A few hours from now, she’ll tie these same laces. And, while it’ll be a sloppy job that leaves a drop of blood slipping from her nose, she’s almost proud of herself.)

(A few days from now, Mike will give her a nicer pair of shoes that better suit the pink dress she’ll borrow from his sister. They’ll be white, scuffed and scratched, and her smile will light up the room when she successfully ties them herself, without needing any of the boys’ help.)

(A few weeks from now, when she’s isolated in the middle of the woods with no one around to help her, her laces will come undone. She’ll try to tie them herself, and she’ll try just tucking and knotting the laces together with her powers. But it won’t work, and she’ll momentarily forget how to tie her laces. But this doesn’t mean she’ll give up.)

(And a few months from then, a police chief will take her in and teach her all sorts of basic life skills. He’ll teach her, in his own way, how to tie shoelaces — after he’s cleaned off the dirt and muck and grass from her first, favorite, and *forever* pair of shoes. There won’t be any bunny ears, and he’ll wait until she’s got it down pat before moving onto something else.)

(Eventually, she’ll master the art of tying her shoelaces with a simple flick of her head; the knots won’t be messy and the laces won’t just gather into huge chunks of tangled string. Eventually, she’ll master

the art of tying her shoelaces with a simple look, but they'll be bunny eared and bigger than Mike would make.)

“Bunny ears.” El repeats with a subtle nod then, wide and curious eyes focused on Mike’s face as a soft, almost absent smile starts to spread across her face.

“Yeah.” Mike smiles, beams really, “Bunny ears.” He says, looking up at her on the couch, awed and intrigued, “You did it, El.”

“Thank you.” She stares down at him, and her hand reaches out as though she’s going to touch him, to grasp his shoulder. She doesn’t though, and Mike isn’t disappointed when she instead runs her hand over the laces, admiring her handiwork.

From his space on the floor, Mike just takes her in; watching as she bounces her legs up and down to see if the ties fall, watching as her cheeks seem to flush when she catches him staring.

He’s in awe of her, he realises then. He’s entranced by her every move, captivated by every little shift of her shoulder, every little flicker of emotion that crosses her face. And, while he’s young and romantic love might not be something he’s mature enough to understand, he’s almost positive that this will be the moment he’ll refer back to when asked *‘so when did you first fall for her?’* — or, at the very least, it will be the moment he knew she was something remarkable that he wouldn’t be able to live without.

(And, some years from now, if Mike gets down on one knee in front of her... it won’t be to tie her shoelaces.)